

The Book of Revelation in One Sermon

Revelation 1-22

Just this once, you may keep your Bibles closed. I intend to talk my way through the whole book of Revelation. Not only in less than four hours, but less than 30 minutes. If you don't want to keep your Bible closed, open to Revelation 1, and page through as we go.

Revelation was designed to help and guide seven first century churches that were entering a time of persecution, probably severe persecution. We would understand Revelation more quickly ourselves if we were enduring more persecution. We are not. But Revelation has much to say to every church between the two comings of Christ, whether or not it is persecuted.

I sent out a one page outline of Revelation during the week. That outline tried to make one simple point about Revelation: **the book of Revelation gives us a series of pictures, each one covering the whole time between Christ's first and second comings.** [repeat]

Each picture, each sequence, has its own encouragement. The Throne Room vision in Rev 4-5 encourages us, the Seal judgements in Rev 6 have their own encouragement, God marking the 144,000 and the great crowd praising him, in Rev 7, is another sequence with its own message.

Each of these basically covers the whole time between the two comings of Christ. Each of these was written to encourage and teach those seven first century churches, and just like the rest of Scripture, each of those messages also encourages and teaches us. Today I have broken Revelation into eleven sections, and we'll spend a few minutes on each one.

I don't expect you to remember any one of these. I hope to give you a feel for how the whole book operates, and a feel for the overall message and flavour. Let's start.

1. Christ and the Lampstands 1:9 – 3:22 This section tells us that the churches are in the presence of the mighty Christ. Christ, who is majestic in this vision like God himself, holds the churches in his right hand, and walks among them, knows them, and guides them. In the vision, Christ has seven stars in his right hand, and walks among the lampstands. (I included 2:1.)

The *stars* are the *angels* of the churches, and the *lampstands* are the *churches*. The angels actually represent the church itself, just like the lampstand does. Each of message begins, “to the *angel* of the church write,” and then Christ speaks as if the angel was the actual church. “To the angel of the church write this: ‘I know *your* works.’” Whose works? The church's works.

Each message ends like this: “whoever has ears to hear, let the hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” *Christ* speaking to the *angel* of the church **is the same as** the *Holy Spirit* speaking to all the *churches*. So the angel is a heavenly representative of the church itself.

The Mighty Christ, clothed as Almighty God himself, holds every church in his right hand. He holds our church, Kleefeld Christian Community is his right hand, as every other church.

We are standing in his holy temple, we are there, that's what lampstands do, and he walks among us and knows us well. The Mighty Christ knows us and every church, and holds us and every church in his right hand. Churches in trouble wonder if they are abandoned by Christ: Never!

2. The Throne Room Vision Rev 4 – 5 The Throne Room vision begins at creation, it begins in Genesis 1. At the center of the universe is a Throne. As soon as John sees this Throne, he knows that this is the center of all that exists. Around this Throne, they praise the One on it for creating everything, because he has a purpose for it all. His creation has a destiny.

But one thing had to happen for creation to reach its destiny: the Lamb had to be slaughtered in order to purchase people for God. Once the Lamb had been slaughtered and purchased people for God, he could take the scroll and bring creation to its joyful destiny.

The Lamb has done all this, and is now taking the seals off that scroll. We live in a world, in a universe, that has its center at that Throne. The message: The present and the future is entirely in the hands of the God on that Throne and the hands of the slaughtered Lamb who bought us and holds that scroll. So the restoring of creation is guaranteed.

3. The Seal Judgements Rev 6; 8:1. When the Lamb starts opening the seals of the scroll, bad things happen on earth. War and famine and plague in particular. But remember, underneath this is good, this is the Lamb taking seals off the scroll that brings Creation to its happy fulfillment, everyone thanking God for his goodness.

A secondary theme in the seals is that God's people are praying for God to bring justice to earth, to make the world right. God's people ask that God would avenge the mistreatment they have suffered. And God is hearing this prayer, all the time.

But the main theme is that behind the troubles of the world, God and the Lamb are bringing creation toward the new heaven and the new earth.

4. The 144,000: God Marks His People for Protection Rev 7. What about God's people during the seal judgements? The marking of the 144,000 answers that. God marks and protects his own.

*Before* any of the seal trouble starts, that's important, *before* any of the destructive winds are released, God writes his name and the Lamb's name on the foreheads of all his people, and lines them up for holy war. God labels them, he marks us as his property, we are protected.

The picture comes originally from the Passover in Exodus, where they marked their doorways with the blood of the Passover lamb, and were protected. The marking on our heads is like that. Ezek 9 is the same: God marks *all* the faithful on their foreheads, protection from judgement.

The 144,000 Israelites marked by God is a symbolic picture of God marking all his people. John *heard* with his *ears* that 144,000 Israelites were sealed. And then he *saw* with his *eyes*, in the new heaven and earth, a crowd from every nation that could not be numbered. Same people.

This great crowd is those who were bought for God with the Lamb's blood, those who were marked with God's name before any destructive wind blew, and we are in that crowd. Their praise shows that they are in the new heaven and new earth.

They and we all made it to the end. Why? Because right at the start, God wrote his and the Lamb's name on our foreheads. God's people are protected during the seal judgements.

5. Seven Trumpet Judgements Rev 8-9, 11:14-19. The *seal* judgements take us from Christ going up in Acts 1, right to final judgement in the sixth seal. The *trumpets* and the *bowls* are the same. All three sets of judgements were taking place in the first century, and all three take us to final judgement and the new heaven and earth.

The message of the seven *trumpets* is tied to the incense altar and to the prayers of all the saints, and the mix of incense and prayer that continually goes up before God. And the prayer is for justice on earth, in particular God's people praying that God would avenge their enemies.

So these trumpet judgements are God answering prayers of all saints, dead and alive, that he will not ignore they way their enemies have treated them.

There is a secondary theme in the trumpet judgements, and that is that the first six trumpets each echo one of the Exodus plagues. That means that God sees his people now, churches in the first and twenty-first centuries, as he saw those Israelites in Egypt, and he judging our enemies and bringing us into the promised land.

Exodus is the secondary theme of the trumpet judgments. The main theme is God answering the prayers of his people for justice on earth. We read at the end of the trumpets that the survivors still would not turn away from their rebellion, they still refused to worship God.

6. The Two Witnesses Rev 11:1-13. The vision of the 144,000 happened between the sixth and seventh *seals*, to answer the question: what about God's people during the *seal* judgements? So also we have the vision of the two witnesses between the sixth and seventh *trumpet* judgements, to answer the same kind of question: what about God's people during the *trumpet* judgements?

The two witnesses are a symbol of the whole persecuted church faithfully worshipping God and the Lamb, worshipping and trusting and serving God and the Lamb. There are several reasons to take the two witnesses as a symbolic picture of the whole church, but the most obvious is that 11:4 says they are the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the whole earth.

Lampstands are churches, we got that in Revelation 1. We all, together, are those two lampstands. (There are more reasons for this view, but not today.) Why two? Because every since Moses, that is the minimum number of witnesses to establish that someone is guilty. Jesus always sent his disciples into the world in pairs.

Here's the message of the two witnesses vision for us: Until our witness is finished, we cannot be injured. We worship God in a hostile environment, but until God's purpose for us is finished, we are untouchable, and God punishes our enemies. And when our faithfulness is complete, the beast has permission to kill us, just as happened to Christ.

And then our enemies gloat and celebrate. And then, God raises us back to life in front of our enemies, and takes us up into his presence. That sequence answers the question: what about the saints during the trumpet judgements? This is the basic life story of each one of us!

7. Holy War: Dragon, Beast, Bride, and Lamb Rev 12:1 – 15:4 In this sequence of 7 visions, the time line is clear. Holy War actually begins just before Christ is born. The dragon is lined up to attack before Christ was born. That's when Holy War starts. And in the seventh vision, in 15:2-4, the saints are in the new heaven and earth. From Christ's birth to the new earth.

In this life, there is only one fight to win and that is the battle to be faithful to God and the Lamb until we die, not to turn away from God. That is the holy battle. The dragon and the beast use fear and lies to turn us away from God and toward the beast.

The dragon uses the beast to attack believers. The woman is the church, the bride. Individual believers are her children. The Holy War visions explain to us why hostility against believers can be so intense, and show that dying while still loyal to Christ makes us triumphant over the beast and the dragon, just as Christ conquered by being faithful to God until death.

Everyone who trusts and serves and worships Christ faithfully until their death has won the only important battle. That is how Paul spoke at his end: *The time for my leaving is near. I have fought the fight, I have run the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is ready for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.* 2 Tim 4:6-8.

8. The Bowl Judgements Rev 15:5 – 16:21. The bowl judgements are the wrath of God poured out on rebellious people. Two themes are clear and strong in the bowl judgements: one is God's wrath against people, and the other is that this is a repeat of the Exodus plagues.

God's wrath. Humanity has rebelled against God a long time. God has invited people to repent by means of kindness and generosity, and he has urged people by partial judgements, and he has made himself clear in creation itself. But humans as a whole do not want their Creator.

Exodus plagues: We noticed some similarity between the trumpet judgements and the Exodus plagues. It is much stronger in the bowl judgements. It is unmistakable that the bowl judgements are patterned after the Exodus plagues. And that puts us in the position of God's oppressed people being rescued by God and taken to a better place which he has prepared for us.

This world is tasting God's wrath, and God is plaguing it in order to bring us out, because he has heard our prayers. That's the message of the bowl judgements. And at the end of the seven bowls, people curse God for bringing these troubles on them. Pain does not cause repentance.

9. The Beast and the Prostitute Revelation 17-19. These chapters expand the seventh bowl, which is the same as the sixth seal. These three chapters describe more fully the destruction of the beast and of the prostitute. There is always a beast, and always a prostitute.

The beast is a bully, any human force that scares us into saying or acting as if Jesus is *not* the Lord of all. The beast is any human force that scares us into denying that Jesus is Lord, and that wants our worship. The prostitute is a seducer, a tempter, in Revelation she is overwhelmingly wealthy: wealthy and luxurious living, wealthy and luxurious possessions.

Jesus always took wealth and possessions as serious competition for the love and loyalty he wanted from people. That's the prostitute. In North America, the beast is present, but restrained. But the prostitute is as powerful and active in NA as she has ever been. We live in her back yard. There is always a beast, and always a prostitute. Both are evil, and both will be destroyed.

10: The Thousand Years and Final Judgement Revelation 19. The thousand years is a reward for those who were faithful to God and the Lamb up to and including their deaths. It is a reward of honour for those who conquered, who were triumphant in the one battle that matters, the holy fight. In the world they were the nobodies, but in the thousand years they will rule with Christ.

We'll talk more later about where and when this is exactly, but that is all secondary. What is primary is that the faithful will rule with Christ, being honoured for overcoming. The rest of Rev 19 shows the judgement of the other people, those who did not repent and worship Christ, and it is fearful judgement.

11: New Heaven and New Earth Rev 21-22. In the new heaven (about which we hear almost nothing) and the new earth (the only important place at the end of Revelation) we are back in the garden of Eden. We are in Eden, where God lives with us and walks with us as he did with them.

It is Eden except that there is no death tree. All the other trees are there, including the tree of life, but no death tree. There is no death tree because the people of God have overcome, we have walked away from that tree to the life tree.

All God ever wanted for himself was to live with his people. He wants to be properly married to his bride and live with her. That's where this all ends. Being with God is a very good thing.

Even among God's people, ending up with God is underrated. But we don't know, so we imagine other benefits of the new earth. In Scripture, though, the constant joy is to be in the presence of God, enjoying his generosity, and singing our thanks to him.

We've been separated from God since Genesis 3, since the guilty pair was put out of the Garden. But God remembers what that was like, and he will get it back, he will get us back! We end up with God, on the new earth, in the new Eden.

God is speaking to us today through these eleven sections. Each one has a strong encouragement from God in it. God urges us to be faithful, and to expect that all of us got trouble, kingdom, and endurance when we came to Jesus.

But God is always telling us in Revelation (and everywhere in the Bible) what's really going on in the world, how to understand what we see on earth, so that we can be faithful to him, and receive his blessing, which is to live with him in the new Eden. God wants this for us even more than we want it for us. Amen.